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Rapporteur: Mr. Thomas **Schlesinger** (Austria)

Addendum

Programme questions

Report of the Secretary-General on the new narrative for section 7A, Economic and social affairs

1. At its 21st meeting, on 17 June 1998, the Committee considered the report of the Secretary-General on the new narrative for section 7A, Economic and social affairs (E/AC.51/1998/6 (sect. 7A)).

2. The Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs introduced the report and responded to queries raised during the Committee's consideration of the report.

Discussion

3. Support was expressed for the new narrative and for the consolidation of the former three departments in the economic and social area in the new Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

4. The view was expressed that the titles of the various subprogrammes were at times inconsistent with the titles in the revised medium-term plan, and that the narrative of each subprogramme should have been accompanied by a statement of objectives under that subprogramme. The view was also expressed that specific performance indicators should have been included in the narrative.

5. A view was expressed that the new narrative was based on the approved medium-term plan and not on programme 28 of the revised medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001, which was still under consideration. With regard to references to the report of the Secretary-General on reform (A/51/950), it was noted that such a document did not constitute a

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legislative mandate for the consolidation of the three departments. Concern was expressed that the reduction in the total number of subprogrammes from the original ten in programmes 5, 7 and 8, to eight under the proposed new programme 28, could have an adverse effect on the implementation of the existing mandates. The Committee received details showing that all the mandates and objectives of the former subprogrammes had been maintained in the relevant subprogrammes of section 7A; the scope of technical cooperation activities in the department should be viewed in conjunction with the activities described in section 21, Regular programme of technical cooperation. It was stressed that the reduction of resources in the new department resulted from the consolidation of the three administrative units into one, and not from substantive areas.

[6. It was considered that the mandate for the fact-finding missions to be undertaken by the Division for the Advancement of Women, as well as the role to be played by the host country, should have been more clearly described in paragraph 7A.38. The representative of the Secretariat indicated that the Division for the Advancement of Women participated, at the invitation of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and when relevant, in fact-finding missions led by the High Commissioner, in order to provide its expertise on gender and women's issues.]

7. It was considered that the report contained some outdated information which needed to be brought up to date by way of a corrigendum.

8. Satisfaction was expressed at the inclusion of the issue of external debt in subprogramme 7, Global development trends, issues and policies, and it was suggested that this issue be also reflected in the proposed programme 28 of the medium-term plan currently under consideration.

Conclusions and recommendations

9. The Committee commended the inclusion in the programme narrative for section 7A, Economic and social affairs, of quantified targets for a number of outputs. That would help in assessing performance. But the Committee noted that the formulation of objectives in the section could be improved. In particular, there was little indication of the quality of output expected to be achieved, or how progress towards the achievement of objectives should be measured. The Committee expressed concern that without such indicators in the programme narrative, eventual evaluation could not fully determine the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the programme.

10. The Committee therefore recommended that the Secretary-General be requested to improve formulation of objectives and indicators of expected achievement when preparing the proposed programme narrative for this programme for the next biennium.

11. The Committee also recommended that the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly consider paragraphs 7A.22, 7A.23 and 7A.24 in the light of the ongoing reform process under General Assembly resolution 51/12 B of 19 December 1997.

12. The Committee further recommended approval of the new narrative of section 7A, Economic and social affairs, subject to the following modifications:

(a) ***Paragraph 7A.6, first sentence***

(i) ***Replace*** **on request** ***with*** **at their request and in accordance with their national policies**

(ii) ***After*** **aimed at** ***insert*** **the promotion of**

(iii) *After* sustainable development *insert* , in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and recent United Nations conferences,

(b) *Paragraph 7A.18*

The first sentence of the paragraph *should read*:

The Commission, which acted as the preparatory body for the Fourth World Conference on Women, has a central role within the United Nations system, assisting the Council, in monitoring, reviewing and appraising progress achieved and problems encountered in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of the Conference at all levels, and advising the Council thereon, in accordance with its strengthened mandate.

(c) *Paragraph 7A.31*

At the end of the third sentence, *insert* , in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and recent United Nations conferences

[(d) *Paragraph 7A.38*

Delete the last sentence]

(e) *Paragraph 7A.49 (c) (ii)*

The last phrase of the paragraph *should read*:

and substantive servicing of 10 meetings, in accordance with relevant decisions and resolutions of the Commission for Social Development, as endorsed by the Economic and Social Council, and the decisions and resolutions of the Council and the General Assembly.

(f) *Paragraph 7A.53*

In the second sentence, *replace* countries *with* States

(g) *Paragraph 7A.75*

(i) In the second sentence, *after* achievements, *insert* as well as constraints and problems

(ii) In the third sentence, *replace* the phrase in parentheses *with* (the developing countries, particularly African countries and least developed countries)

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Addendum

Programme questions

Report of the Secretary-General on the new narrative for section 26, Public information

1. At its 22nd meeting, on 18 June 1998, the Committee for Programme and Coordination considered the report of the Secretary-General on the new narrative for section 26, Public information (E/AC.51/1998/6 (Sect.26)).

2. The representative of the Secretary-General introduced the new narrative in respect of section 26, Public information, and responded to queries raised during the Committee's consideration of the section.

Discussion

3. Great importance was attached to the public information activities of the Organization. The reorientation of the public information activities was noted, under which the communications function was being placed at the heart of the strategic management of the Organization. Appreciation was expressed for the efforts to reach out to new audiences and to convey the message of the United Nations at the grassroots level. Note was also taken of the emphasis given to communication and dissemination of information at the country and local levels. It was emphasized that it was essential for the Organization to explain the role and range of its public information activities. The view was expressed that the promotion of priority issues, such as peace and security, sustainable development, environment, ageing, drug abuse, crime control and women and economic development should be given solid support. It was pointed out that, since the image of the United Nations

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in some countries was positive, unlike in some others, information strategy to different target groups should be devised accordingly.

4. It was observed that some of the activities under subprogramme 1, Promotional services, and subprogramme 2, Information services, appeared to be similar and thus required clarification.

5. Concern was expressed that, unlike in the medium-term plan for 1998-2001, there was no adequate reference made in the new programme narrative to cooperation between Member States and the United Nations in the field of public information activities. The view was expressed that it would have been useful to indicate performance indicators in the narrative, so that the achievement of the objectives and its timeliness could be measured.

6. Attention was drawn to the conclusions of the Committee on Information and the view expressed that qualitative enhancement of information material, training courses for developing countries and economies in transition, and publication in the six United Nations official languages were not reflected adequately in the new programme narrative. The view was expressed that the description of the role of the United Nations information centres should have been further elaborated, and comments were made to the effect that no mention was made of the needs of the host Governments.

7. It was observed that certain phrases, such as "close contact" in paragraph 26.4 (a), "key constituencies" in paragraph 26.8 and "innovative ways" in paragraph 26.9 required clarification. It was also pointed out that the overall guidance referred to in paragraph 26.4 (a) was provided by the intergovernmental bodies, and not by the Secretariat, and that the latter was to follow those guidelines.

8. The view was expressed that the priorities mentioned in paragraphs 26.7 and 26.10 should be based on the medium-term plan. With regard to the order of listing priority issues, it was pointed out that peace and security should have been placed at the beginning and, although the list of priorities was not exhaustive, information activities on peacekeeping operations should have been included.

9. The organization of the first United Nations World TV Forum was appreciated. However, the view was expressed that it would have been more appropriate to mention such examples in the introductory remarks, rather than in the programme narrative. It was noted that another edition of the Forum would be organized by the Department in 1998.

10. Great importance was attached to the role of the United Nations information centres and field offices. It was pointed out that further strengthening of the United Nations information centres and field offices should be encouraged. Support was given to the professional training in respect of the United Nations information centres, but concern was expressed about the limitations imposed by the resource allocations referred to in paragraph 26.12. The view was expressed that the United Nations information centres might include the host country's language in addition to the six United Nations official languages in their public information material. It was noted that, as the key communicators to the European public, the role of the United Nations Information Services at Geneva and Vienna was very important.

11. Clarification was requested as to which subprogrammes under the Public information programme carried out the information activities pertaining to the campaign for the global awareness of the critical economic situation of Africa, and the view was expressed that, in addition to publications, other forms of public information should also be used in support of the awareness campaign.

12. It was noted that there was a good balance in the new narrative between traditional and electronic media. However, it was pointed out that, while the best use of modern electronic information technology should be encouraged, due priority should be given, in parallel, to the traditional media, such as print media, radio and television. It was emphasized that the role of such traditional media was extremely important in disseminating information, especially in developing countries, since that still remained the best placed media to reach all the corners of the world. While expressing support for the use of electronic means of communication, especially the Internet, the view was expressed that the possibilities of transmitting the United Nations messages through the Internet in all six official languages should be explored. The observation was made that the United Nations home page was one of the best, but concern was expressed that it was not available in all the official languages of the United Nations.

13. As regards direct shortwave broadcasting, the view was expressed that, since there was no decision on the matter yet, its mention in the new narrative was inappropriate.

Conclusions and recommendations

14. The Committee commended the inclusion in the programme narrative on section 26, Public information, of quantified targets for a number of outputs. That would help in assessing performance. But the Committee noted that the formulation of objectives in the section could be improved. In particular, there was little indication of the quality of output expected to be achieved, or how progress towards the achievement of objectives should be measured. The Committee expressed concern that, without such yardsticks in the programme narrative, eventual evaluation could not fully determine the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the programme.

15. The Committee therefore recommended that the Secretary-General be requested to improve formulation of objectives and indicators of expected achievement when preparing the proposed programme narrative for this programme for the next biennium.

16. The Committee further decided to recommend to the General Assembly the approval of the new programme narrative for section 26, Public information, subject to the following modifications:

(a) At the end of the second sentence of paragraph 26.1, *add* and 52/70 of 10 December 1997.

(b) In the last sentence of paragraph 26.2, *replace* 1996, of the first United Nations *with* 1996, and in 1997, of the United Nations.

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Addendum

Programme questions: evaluation (item 4 (e))

Strengthening the role of evaluation findings in programme design, delivery and policy directives

1. At its 2nd and 4th meetings, on 1 and 2 June 1998, the Committee considered the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on strengthening the role of evaluation findings in programme design, delivery and policy directives transmitted under cover of a note by the Secretary-General (A/53/90). The report reviewed in-depth and self-evaluation activities during the period 1996-1997.

Discussion

2. The report was discussed in the context of its function of reviewing the effectiveness of the United Nations evaluation practices and the contributions of such evaluation findings to improving programme design and delivery and the issuance of policy directives. While its brevity and clarity were appreciated, regret was expressed about the rather descriptive nature of the report, which did not reveal all the potential of evaluation. Observations were made on the uneven progress in the establishment of evaluation systems in the different offices and departments. It did not appear that the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget and the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation were being adequately implemented in all parts of the Organization, in particular with regard to support services. In this connection, it was observed that only a few departments had sought the views of stakeholders and clients, and that common services had not yet been subject to evaluation. Disappointment was expressed that the overall situation had not changed significantly in the last two years.

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3. The view was expressed that the issue of an effective evaluation system was of special importance in the context of ongoing reform and, in particular, the Secretary-General's proposals on results-based budgeting. The evaluation practice of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) approach, which emphasized feedback from and participation of Governments in evaluation processes, were cited as examples of good practices. These practices were contrasted with the use of efficiency reviews designed to achieve savings, notably in support services and in the political programmes. It was acknowledged that the diversity of the methods and approaches to evaluation reflects differences in the nature of the programmes; however it was also stressed that evaluation should be based on standards that enable Member States, the Committee and other reviewing intergovernmental bodies to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the programme. In this connection, it was suggested that, in accordance with rule 107.1 of the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget and Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation, evaluation standards and analysis should utilize performance indicators that would make it possible to conduct an in-depth analysis of whether Secretariat implementation of programmes is efficient and having the desired effects.

4. The view was expressed that the Office of Internal Oversight Services guidelines on programme monitoring and evaluation issued jointly with the Department of Management did not conform with the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning. The view was expressed that the guidelines should have been submitted to the Committee for its consideration and approval before their issuance to programme managers. In this connection, it was requested that the guidelines be provided to the Committee to enable it to take appropriate action. The view was expressed that the Committee should have been consulted before these guidelines were issued. It was further noted that the guidelines were of a quality which was far inferior to articles VI and VII and the glossary contained in the annex to the existing Regulations and Rules. The Office of Internal Oversight Services was commended for its initiative in assisting programme managers to discharge their responsibilities with regard to programme monitoring and self-evaluation and was encouraged to report on the status of implementation of the guidelines in due course. The Secretariat stated that the guidelines were consistent with the existing General Assembly Regulations Governing Programme Planning and that the report was submitted in accordance with regulation 7.4.

5. Views were expressed that the issue of the guidelines, as mentioned in section 3 of the report (para. 33), should be considered at the thirty-ninth session of the Committee for Programme and Coordination.

6. It was observed that the General Assembly and its Committees had not yet considered the implications of the Secretary-General's proposals on results-based budgeting, and it was further observed that the guidelines should not prejudge the outcome of this process.

7. Concern was expressed about the evaluation of the reports on economic issues by consultants. They should have been examined by the United Nations staff who were familiar with the issues and aware of the views of Member States.

8. Specific measures for improving the evaluation process were proposed. The need for inclusion of information on the utilization of evaluation results was suggested and the need for evaluation findings to be given to functional intergovernmental bodies reviewing the programmes was reaffirmed. The establishment of monitoring and evaluation units within offices and departments was called for, as was the systematization of evaluation processes and the dissemination of good practices as a means of improving efficiency and effectiveness.

9. It was noted that the guidelines were an attempt to establish some minimal standards for the new style of public sector management, and it was observed in this regard that the intergovernmental character of the United Nations should be borne in mind. The view was expressed that comprehensive programme monitoring and evaluation were essential for effective management within the Secretariat and for effective review by intergovernmental bodies. It was further expressed that effective functioning of the Committee and the Secretariat required that the mandated programme monitoring and evaluation take place. This was necessary for them to fulfil their respective roles in prioritizing activities, determining the validity of programmes, assessing old mandates, providing guidance on programme design, identifying duplication and overlap and appraising levels of coordination.

10. The view was also expressed that the existing Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget and the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation are most comprehensive, clear and specific. If followed, they would provide a sound basis for effective monitoring and evaluation; regrettably, these Regulations and Rules had not been fully implemented. It was further expressed that self-evaluation by programme managers was a valuable function, as there were too many programmes and limited time for evaluations to be conducted only by intergovernmental bodies. In this regard, regulation 7.3 and rule 107.3 provided for self-evaluations to be conducted according to the guidelines established by the Central Evaluation Unit. Such guidelines, recently issued, were a hopeful indication that self-evaluations would be effectively conducted.

Conclusions and recommendations

11. The Committee viewed effective programme monitoring and evaluation as important elements in internal management and intergovernmental reviews. The Committee stressed the importance and necessity of further improving and integrating evaluation into the cycle of programme planning, budgeting and monitoring with a view to improving and strengthening programme formulation and implementation.

12. The Committee recommended that the General Assembly approve the addition of the following two programmes to the schedule of in-depth evaluations; reports on those evaluations were to be submitted to the Committee at its forty-first session: policy coordination and sustainable development and population.